

2/14/2005 This Week in Congress

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February 14, 2005

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find it useful.

Increasing Veterans' Care in Northeast Kansas

This week, I hosted a forum to give veterans in northeast Kansas an opportunity to discuss the delivery of benefits and health care through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). My guest for the event was Robert Malone, Director of the Department of Veterans Affairs' Eastern Kansas Health Care System, based in Topeka and Leavenworth.

This was the fifth forum that I have held across the district, with others in Hutchinson, Goodland, Salina and Clay Center. As the age and number of our veterans increase, so will their need for VA benefits and health care services. My goal with these forums is to provide veterans with an opportunity to discuss their needs and experiences. Our country owes a tremendous debt to our veterans. By hearing directly from them, we can do a better job of providing veterans with the highest quality of care possible.

I appreciated the hospitality of Principal Tom Palmer and the Sabetha Middle School for allowing us to hold the forum at their facility. Additionally, I would like to thank Commander Patty Locher of the Sabetha Veterans of Foreign Wars and Commander Randall Garber of the Sabetha American Legion for helping with the event.

Helping Secure America's Borders

On Thursday, I supported House passage of H.R. 418, known as the REAL ID Act. This legislation contains provisions from the 9-11 Commission's work to improve homeland security. The REAL ID Act would close a three-mile hole in the fortified U.S./Mexico border fence near San Diego. It would also tighten driver's license standards for foreign visitors. In order to qualify for a U.S. driver's license, immigrants must prove that they are in the country legally.

President Bush strongly supports this legislation and has said that he looks forward to its passage. The REAL ID Act now goes to the Senate for debate.

Working to Increase Agriculture Trade with Cuba

On Wednesday, I introduced legislation that seeks to clarify federal regulations on agriculture trade with Cuba. This

bipartisan legislation mirrors similar legislation introduced by Senator Pat Roberts on the same day.

Cuba represents a multi-million dollar market for American farm products. For too long, other nations have stepped in to fill the trade gap once dominated by the United States. In 2000, I was successful in introducing legislation lifting sanctions on agriculture trade with Cuba. That legislation allowed for the export of Kansas farm products to Cuba for the first time in 38 years and passed overwhelmingly in the House, 301 to 116. The legislation that I introduced will help producers clarify existing laws and will streamline the process for producers to market or finalize sales and trade agreements with Cuba.

While we have opened the door to trade with Cuba, bureaucracy and vague regulations have kept us from moving forward. Producers trying to expand agriculture exports should not face a roadblock in Washington, D.C. I also had the opportunity to discuss trade issues with Lt. Governor John Moore this week who was in town for a meeting of the Lt. Governors Association.

Working to Address Kansas' Transportation Needs

This week I joined Congressman Don Young (R-AK), Chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee to introduce comprehensive transportation legislation, which authorizes funding for federal highways, public transportation programs and safety initiatives for the next six years. In Kansas, this bill would invest more than \$2 billion in transportation programs and is estimated to create thousands of new jobs.

The transportation system in Kansas is vital to the success of our state. Our roads do more than just allow us to transport goods to market. They connect communities, forming the very fabric of our state. Therefore, it is important that our infrastructure needs are met, and this legislation will help meet those needs.

Kansas has the fourth highest number of public roads in the nation, totaling more than 134,500 miles, and ranks third among all states in the number of bridges. The First Congressional District alone has more road miles than 29 states in the United States.

As a member of the House Transportation Committee, I was actively involved in Congress' last comprehensive transportation bill that became law in 1998. Transportation is vital for the economic welfare of Kansas, and I will continue to be a strong advocate for our transportation needs as Congress debates this bill. I have urged my colleagues to take quick action on this to get resources out of Washington, D.C. and into our communities where it is needed most.

Hearing from USDA Secretary Johanns

On Thursday, U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns spent an hour testifying before the House Agriculture Committee. The meeting allowed the committee to get responses on a number of issues facing the agriculture industry. The topics that Secretary Johanns covered were Canadian cattle trade, efforts to persuade Japan to end its ban on American beef, and the Bush administration's proposed \$587 million in farm subsidy cuts for next year. He also used this as a time to get to know members and the issues that are important to their districts.

I look forward to working with Secretary Johanns to address these and other issues facing our agriculture industry.

On the Road

Hays

On Monday, I joined local officials for the grand opening of Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas. The 16-bay, 14,000 square-foot facility will house eight ACCESS buses, three maintenance bays and personnel offices. ACCESS provides rural public transportation in Hays and Ellis County, with over 70 percent of riders being disabled or elderly and 20 percent being members of the general public.

This is the first building to be constructed in Kansas specifically as a rural public transit facility and will be a great resource for Northwest Kansas. The services provided by Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas serve as an example to other rural communities as a way to increase the quality of life for their citizens.

Leavenworth

On Tuesday, I joined Director Robert Malone of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Veterans Affairs Medical Center for a tour of the facility. This week was National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans. Touring the Eisenhower facility allowed me to meet with staff members and patients and thank them for their service. I serve on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, so

this visit and the knowledge I gained from it will help me as we shape policy focusing on veterans' needs.

Seneca

On Friday, I joined Administrator Sarah Sourk and Director of Nursing Mary Tegtmeier for a tour of Crestview Manor nursing home. Crestview Manor is a long-term care facility with 34 beds, and over half of its patients suffer from Alzheimer's disease. I appreciated the opportunity to tour the facility and meet with patients and staff to hear their concerns about improving their quality of care.

Salina

On Saturday, I joined Mayor Monte Shadwick and hundreds of family members, friends and fellow citizens at St. John Military School in Salina to welcome back the 71 soldiers of the Kansas Army National Guard, C Battery, 2nd Battalion, of the 130th Field Artillery. The 2nd battalion is headquartered in Hiawatha with units in Abilene, Atchison, Concordia, Horton, Marysville, Sabetha, Salina and Troy.

It was an honor to welcome home these brave Kansans who answered their country's call to service. I also appreciate the support and sacrifice that family members, friends and employers extended to our fighting soldiers. The support that was extended to these soldiers serves as a testament to our communities, the First District and our state.

In the Office

In my office for meetings this week were a number of Kansans. In the office from Junction City was Morris Doxier from the American Institute of Architects in Kansas. He discussed energy issues, affordable housing and environmentally friendly building practices. Also in the office was National Education Association Board member Tom Brungardt, a social studies teacher from Junction City, who discussed general education issues in Kansas. Don Augustine, Electric Director of Russell, and Gary Shike, City Administrator of Oberlin, were in this week on behalf of the Kansas Municipal Utilities.

Kansas State University had a large delegation in to discuss various issues. In from Manhattan were Dean of Agriculture Fred Cholick and his assistant Steven Graham to discuss agriculture and energy issues. Dr. Beth Unger, Vice Provost, and Dr. Virginia Moxley, Associate Dean of Human Ecology, were in to discuss distance education and nutrition program funding. Dr. Ron Trewyn, Dr. Jim Guikema, Dr. Terry King, Dr. Dick Hayter, Dr. Steve White and Dr. Dean Zollman were in to discuss defense issues, and Kansas State University President Jon Wefald also came by to visit about issues facing higher education.

Very truly yours,

Jerry